

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Missouri's implementation of the federal Family Preservation and Family Support Services Act originated from several community and state initiatives. Two initiatives launched in the late 1980's gave a cohesive shape and direction to the state's approach. St. Louis Walbridge Caring Communities Program demonstrated the importance of neighborhood-based efforts linked to schools. The family preservation initiative showed the value of cross-agency planning and program implantation. In November 1993, the late Governor Carnahan established the Family Investment Trust (FIT) as a state-level entity. By developing community-based supports and services, the aim is to enhance the well-being of children, which is inseparable from the well-being of their families and the stability and economic viability of the communities where they live.

In the fall of 2001, through an executive order from Governor Holden, change the name of FIT to Family and Community Trust (FACT) and created a Board of Directors, impose a deepening of partnerships and established a reporting system for six benchmark measures. The framework for Missouri's Systems Reform Initiative encompassed a mission statement, the six core results, policy directions and four principles upon which to build stronger Missouri Community Partnerships.

Missouri's Mission for FACT and community partnerships is: "For children to have strong families, and communities where parents are working, children are succeeding in school, and growing up healthy, safe, and prepared to enter productive adulthood." The six core results are: 1) parents working; 2) children safe in their families and families safe in their communities; 3) young children ready to enter school; 4) children and families that are healthy; 5) children and youth succeeding in school; 6) youth ready to enter the work force and become productive citizens.

Missouri's FACT policy directions are: 1) being accountable for achieving results; 2) bringing services closer to where families live and children attend school; 3) active community involvement in decisions that affect their well-being; 4) using dollars more flexibly and effectively to meet community needs.

Missouri's FACT principles are:

- Families are the key to children's success.
- Communities are supports for families.
- Good schools, supports, and services build strong communities.
- Economic vitality of a community is essential for good schools, supports, and services.

SFY 04 Update

The adage, “doing more with less”, has never been more apt a description for the work of Community Partnerships during the current fiscal year. In the past three years the Community Partnerships appropriation has consistently been reduced and our partnerships have been called upon to do more with less each year. At this time in SFY-03, the Partnerships were leveraging on average \$5.50 for every dollar of state funding. In SFY-04 Partnerships were leveraging \$10.60 for every state dollar and in SFY-05 that ratio is expected to increase to \$29.50 on every dollar of state funding.

Due in part to the reduction of funds, there has been a shift in focus for our Partnerships. Since their inception they have been focused on impacting the Six Core Results in more of a direct-service model. Now the primary focus of the Partnerships is one of convener; they are the entity that brings together the community around the critical issues impacting the lives of children and families in their area. In this role the Partnerships enjoy a high level of respect.

The Family and Community Trust Board of Directors continue to lead the efforts as the policy body for the work of Missouri’s Community Partnerships. This year for the first time in many years, the Board enjoys full membership: eight public sector members and nine private sector members. They come together as a Board four times each calendar year. They met recently to reaffirm their commitment to the mission statement and role they agreed to when they were created. They intend to focus on strategic planning efforts in their upcoming meetings in order to do long range planning.

Each year in September as a component of our state contract with each Partnership they report on various strategies that are working to improve conditions for children and families in Missouri. These results are assembled into a Community Results Reports and are published on the web at www.mofact.org. The Community Result Reports are shared with the state legislature and are included in this report.

Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Pilot

In January 2005, Missouri was pleased to have been one of seven states selected by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), for the *Strengthening Families Pilot through Early Care and Education Pilot*. Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education is a learning partnership between the CSSP and the seven selected states interested in infusing the Strengthening Families Approach into policies and practice supports in the early childhood and child protective services sectors in their state. The states selected are Missouri, Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) will manage the pilot over the next two years, provide ongoing technical assistance, communication, documentation and policy development across the states. States will receive technical assistance, strategic planning, and opportunities for peer exchange among the members of the network, according to their requests and needs. The Center for the Study of Social Policy and the seven states will work together to determine how each of these initiative components will be funded. The intention is to that together strategies can be developed to acquire sufficient funding to accommodate each state's needs to implement Strengthening Families statewide.

In 2001, CSSP began seeking a strategic, feasible approach to child abuse and neglect prevention that was systematic; national in scope; would reach large numbers of very young children; and would have an impact long before abuse or neglect occurred. The result of this two year investigation was a list of protective strategies quality early care and education programs employed to build the protective factors to reduce child abuse and neglect. These strategies include:

- Facilitate of friendships and mutual support;
- Strengthen parenting;
- Respond to family crises;
- Link families to services and opportunities;
- Facilitate children's social and emotional development;
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect;
- Value and support parents.

Missouri has long held the belief that strengthening families is an important key to reducing the incidence of child maltreatment. Missouri also embraces the belief that ALL children deserve quality early childhood experiences and is working toward the development of a strong statewide early childhood education and care system. The opportunity to blend these two strong values into a more strategic, intentional approach through the Strengthening Families Initiative will move Missouri to the next level in reducing child abuse and neglect.

Missouri plan is to create a statewide prevention plan and infrastructure based on a continuum of prevention services, i.e. primary, secondary, and tertiary, utilizing the early childhood community as a vehicle, that will as stated in the guidance allow Missouri to:

- Incorporate the five protective strategies into our statewide early childhood infrastructure either through licensing and regulation, accreditation facilitation, credentialing, child care subsidies, or through grant programs or incentives.
- Provide training or technical assistance to a substantial number of early care and education professionals to help implement the *Strengthening Families* approach.

- Make early care and education programs a more integral part of foster care placement and prevention efforts, Family to Family foster care planning, or Community Partnerships for Protecting Children.
- Enhance collaboration between child abuse and neglect prevention advocates and programs, and early childhood professionals and programs.
- Developing a network of funders in the State, prepared to support necessary training and technical assistance to bring many programs in line with the Strengthening Families Initiative.

This initiative will allow Missouri agencies and organizations to come together and to begin to think strategically about this issue. Existing dollars and programs can be focused in a more intentional manner to incorporate the five protective factors. These programs and initiatives will be analyzed to identify duplication and gaps in services and to consider strategies to maximize resources.